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The Meaning of the Ballot – An Aftermath

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For The Greenbury Times
By Mrs. Mattie McEllan Brown.

The Meaning of the Ballot.—An Aftermath.

An important event confronts the American people in ^{every} the quadrennial election. The ordinary occurrence of voting has made the event a commonplace occasion to many. As the breathing of pure air is a process of vital importance never analysed, or considered by the multitude, so the voting to elect men to varied functions of government is rarely considered in its true bearing on the general good.

What are the prerogatives of the voter's privilege? It cannot be regarded as a natural right, such as comes with all human intelligence, for then the standard of intelligence would determine the eligibility instead of sex. It must therefore be a privilege conferred by an authority beyond, or above the subject voting. And this we find to be the exact fact. The privilege of determining which among us should be selected to wield our power was secured to us by our vigorous forefathers, who verified their own equality, and even superiority to the sovereign ^{to be} who ruled over them in England. In other words they proved more sovereign than he. This privilege therefore, carries the the prerogative to rule.

But all cannot rule in the same field, though each may hold the prerogative; therefore all can unite by ballot in choosing one who shall use the power, deputed to him by their votes, for ruling all.

Where then, is sovereign power vested? Evidently in the men who transfer it by their vote; a ballot for a chosen countryman surely expresses the opinion that he will use the conferred power wisely.

This choosing one to exercise our power is an opinion, an expression of personality, weak or strong as the case may be; but in every case personality is primary power. "All power is of God," says the great Book and is manifested through personality.

If this fact is not clear to all, we go back to the historic consensus of public opinion gathered up by ballotation in this country. The quadrennial

election moves the hands on the dial of progress toward the moral zenith, or political nadir every time, according to the opinion, or personality deputed. When the strong, healthful, patriotic people secured just representation, prosperity for all and true progress were unimpeded. Contrariwise, when the riff-raff lead the movements the result was indifferent, without moral power; the people were suffering from base conditions and degradation entailed.

When Abraham Lincoln was a youth he went to New Orleans on an excursion; while there he saw a pretty mulatto woman sold on the auction block. He stooped down to a small friend standing by his side and said, "If ever I have a chance to strike that, I'll strike it hard."

Later there came a division of opinion in politics in the small town where Mr. Lincoln lived. When all his friends, lawyers, judges, and other dignitaries of the old party implored him to conserve his vote; not to throw it away on an impossible cause: He said; "Gentlemen, you can vote as you like, but my vote shall strike slavery." Did he throw away his vote? Let the history of his achievements answer. His strong personality became the balast in the Ship of State during its fiercest civil gale.

And so should the vote ^{of} every noble character measure up to the standard of pending problems. What evil should be overthrown? What hoary crime entrenched in civil authority should be punished? What slavery should be stricken by vigorous ballots? The prerogative of the ballot involves the whole gamut of civil relations with men, and responsibility to God for such personal power. Civil equality gives to thinking voters an opportunity for the improvement of such conditions; not only civil but moral and educational. And upon these conditions of life depend the scope of opportunity for the masses of people for self-betterment and social progress.

~~The world moves toward actual freedom and liberal opportunities~~

The world moves toward actual freedom and liberal opportunities very, very slowly. Because freedom is of the spirit, a spiritual empowerment, and the people are dominated by material conditions of life, in which the most absolute tyrannies are often secreted.

A freedom which is based upon an order of law founded in reason, is purely scientific and deeply grounded in the nature of intelligent being. Its prerogative is unquestioned, its results unassailable.

The conventional right to vote is but a step in the direction of genuine freedom. This step may be a long one, or a short one in exact proportion to the individualizing power it brings to the state. In other words the right to vote is based on a theory of freedom which enlarges the voter's actual being, only when it commands his conduct, as in the case of Mr. Lincoln; or when executively applied to his relations among men. Theory void of actuality ^{in conduct} ^{base} is as ~~xxxxx~~ in politics as hypocrisy in religion.

The notorious absence of a decisive personality in our so-called freemen of the ballot brings about and maintains deplorable states of immorality, debasement and suffering. Such a tragedy as that of Clark street, where a citizen debauched himself in his own home on a quiet Sabbath day to the extent of idiocy and shot his devoted wife for refusing her hard-earned money ^{for a child to buy more drinks} is the result of indifferent manhood in the civil responsibilities. When freemen deputize all their thinking to "jobbers" the whole people fall into the chasm together, and are then obliged to pull themselves out, each in his own individual capacity. It is then people do some thinking on their own account, and begin to reorganize public opinion on saving methods of change. And this is why there are so many different parties in the field of politics.

If history is true to its own foreshadowing, a quiet revolution is now brewing which must eventuate in improved conditions. Intelligent discontent is a

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certain mark of growth, and growth is never downward where people are measurably rooted in freedom. Suffrages are the individual rootlets of the state. The product is the exact counterpart of principles deposited in ballotation. It is the fundamental holding ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ manifoldness of character.

A sort of social consciousness seems dawning in our civilization, demanding a fuller representation of the best instincts and truest character. ^{The forms of our government} ~~It~~ cannot be other than a temporary, lop-sided civil autonomy, halting and staggering, for want of the perfecting balance which nature furnishes in the double type of the human race.

President Seth Low says; "Only when the type had been individualized; only when each type came to represent a single letter, was the era of combination reached." The mechanical process of moulding type into lines and into columns does not destroy ^o the value of ^a ~~no~~ ~~one~~ single letter, but greatly enhances its power, as the line and the column stand together for great ends.

The manifoldness of personality is a higher power than any single unit, or sovereign.

Cincinnati, Ohio. ~~M. M. Callahan Brown.~~